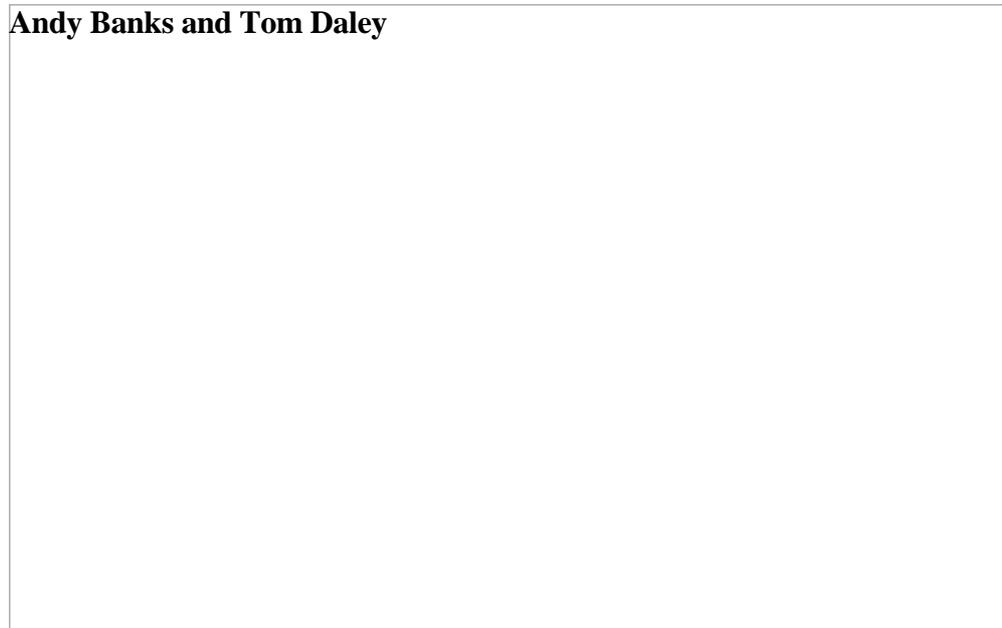


Pool knowledge and a passion for success

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Andy Banks and Tom Daley



- **Andy Banks tells of his passion for learning and personal desire to help young divers fulfil their potential**
- **He reveals the background behind his 'money and medals' philosophy**
- **Hard work will beat talent, but not if talent works hard**
- **Develop your coaching expertise by listening, asking questions, discussing and arguing**
- **Vital to keep even the toughest sessions enjoyable and interesting**

A conversation with [Andy Banks](#) leaves you convinced of one thing, and not a little exhausted!

The exhaustion comes from trying to keep up with the sheer energy that radiates from this man who has coached divers to world and European titles, been a major driving force in transforming the face of diving in the UK and, through his protégé Tom Daley, helped bring diving to prime-time television entertainment.

And the thing you are convinced of? That he is 100% passionate about diving.

Banks clearly loves the sport, which he admits he was not so good at during his own diving career: ‘I reached national level, but it was the bottom end, and I knew I wasn’t good enough to reach the top. For me, I thought I’d done a good dive if I landed the right way up and it didn’t hurt,’ he jokes.

‘When I left school, I went on to join the Met (Metropolitan Police), and while in London, met a diving coach who really changed everything for me. He (Pete Squires) became a very significant mentor for me. He talked about the science behind diving, such as “biomechanics”, and I thought: “Whoa! There’s a lot involved in this sport that I know absolutely nothing about.”

‘I also started to coach some of the less experienced kids at his club, which I really enjoyed, and ultimately decided that this was what I wanted to do as a career. I really wanted to help kids be as good as they could be, and because I was passionate about it, I went on a mission to learn as much as I could through a university degree in human movement and constantly talking to the best in the sport.’

At the time, diving was very much an amateur sport. ‘There were no professional diving coach jobs,’ says Banks. ‘I had to create my own job, which I did throughout my time at university so that, by the end of the three-year course, I had built up the Bradford programme from two hours of beginners a week into a scheme brimming with enthusiastic youngsters and the top two divers on the junior national squad.

‘We had a lot of local authority support, and they agreed to employ me full-time when my course ended in 1988.’

Bradford and beyond

It was in Bradford that he learnt his ‘money and medals’ philosophy. A large programme filled with youngsters who were progressing and enjoying their sport and therefore kept coming back month after month brought in the finance to keep the council officers and members happy. It also meant that he could spend time concentrating on the elite, and strive for excellence with the talent that was found, which brought some success and a shop window to help further develop the programme.

If Banks had remained in Bradford, then perhaps Britain’s greatest diver would not have been discovered or would have been a young Yorkshire lad or lass. But it was the next stage of his coaching career that took the sport in the direction it has travelled in for the past two decades.

‘Bradford’s facility only went up to the five-metre board, and I wanted to be at a venue with the full range up to the 10-metre board. Plymouth had the facilities but no money to employ a diving coach so I used an idea being used by Chris Snode in Crystal Palace and set up a private business that aimed to combine diving with gymnastics and trampolining.

‘My mentor (Pete) became my first business partner. We used my “money and medals” philosophy, and we went to Plymouth and persuaded the local authority to let us turn around their “white elephant” from a venue that, at that time, was very much under-utilised into one that offered the sport to all-comers and aimed to find talent and nurture it towards success. Plymouth City Council agreed with the proposal, and the rest is history!’

Banks says his coaching career has been all about developing his own knowledge and skills.

‘What’s important for me is to find people who know more than me and to learn as much as possible from them – I call it “headsitting”. If you want to be good at something, you need to develop your knowledge and experience, but I think the real key is the passion behind the drive to succeed. You will never put the time and effort into something if you are not really passionate about it. It’s that passion that makes it easy to get out of bed in the morning and has made the last 30 years both rewarding and enjoyable.’

And Banks says he has never stopped learning and never will. It’s not just in seminars and on courses where those vital nuggets of information are absorbed, or those sparks occur that can change the way a problem is approached.

‘I’ve probably learnt as much in a bar as I have on the poolside, by listening to people, asking questions, discussing/arguing and ultimately understanding and learning.

‘The statement “every expert starts as a beginner” is very true. I started off as very much a beginner coach. I wasn’t trying to be an Olympic coach, that was way out of my league at the start and wasn’t even on the radar, but I **really** wanted to learn. And as the knowledge and experience grew, so did an ability to coach successfully, and I gradually became more expert by default.

‘As an athlete, to be among the best in the world, I believe you have to have an innate, natural talent. You have to work extremely hard at that talent, and you need a knowledgeable and professional support team to help facilitate the journey. Hard work will beat talent, but not if

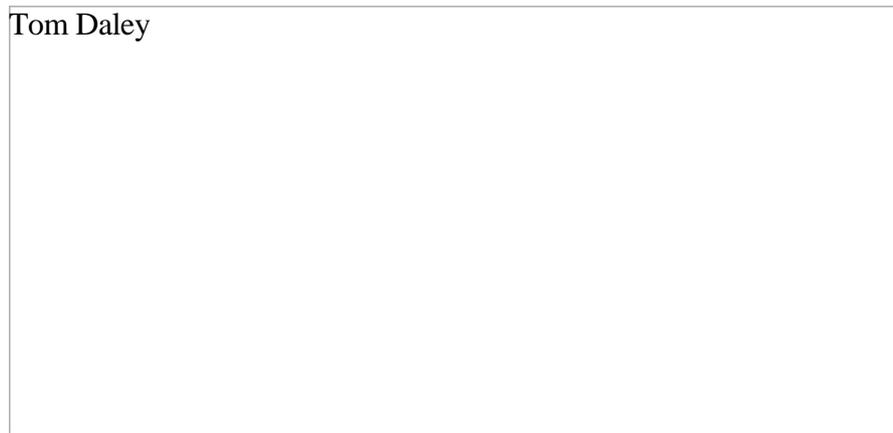
talent works hard!

‘Do you need talent to be a good coach? I am not sure – you certainly need the “hard work” part. I think, when it comes to coaching, you have to know your sport back to front and have empathy with the individuals you are working with.’

As luck would have it

So when it comes to Banks’ most successful and famous protégé so far, he says there was a massive talent but also a slice of luck that wouldn’t have happened if he had been coaching in Bradford.

Tom Daley



Tom (Daley) was a Plymouth boy, living 10 minutes from a high performance centre for diving. He really wanted to dive, he was really good at it, and he had the right support from the outset to facilitate a successful outcome.

‘When Tom walked into our centre with his dad, he saw what we were doing and said: “I want to do that.” It was the right time in my career, and we had a support team that was ready to help him thrive.

‘He could have lived in Exeter or Bristol, or just never come along that day. Perhaps his dad might not have been able to bring him along, and perhaps his family wouldn’t have supported him. Then we’d never have seen him dive. Perhaps there are a lot of potential Tom Daleys out there,’ says Banks. ‘But they don’t live close to a diving pool so we may never see them.

‘Although Tom had a fantastic innate talent, I didn’t see it straight away. There’s a well known story that the first time I saw him, I stated to all the coaches there that: “This boy will never be a diver.” Oops!

‘In my defence, he stood crying at the back of the board for 20 minutes and refused very stubbornly to even get on the board, let alone dive off it, and my response was biased by what I saw. Once I saw him actually dive in the pool, there was a definite wow factor, and I ate my words.’

What Daley has, and Banks too, is that enjoyment of the sport. Yes, it’s his career, but it’s not just a job.

‘Kids have to enjoy what they are doing. If they don’t enjoy the sport, then what’s the point? Repetition is essential, but too much is boring and not fun. On the other hand, pushing too fast is scary and likely to go wrong, which hurts and is also not fun.

‘Getting the programme right should allow consistency and confidence to develop alongside each other in an environment that is fun.

‘Senior athletes who are aiming for success on the world stage have to knuckle down, and there will be times when training will be tough, but that doesn’t mean we can’t still have a laugh and a joke and keep training interesting and as enjoyable as possible.’

Any questions?

ConnectedCoaches members had questions for Andy. We threw them his way.

Dave Turner: What safeguarding challenges did you encounter when working with elite children in your sport? And how did you recognise and respond to these challenges to ensure the athletes were considered children first and elite sportspeople second?

Andy Banks: This harks back to what I was discussing earlier. For all children, it's about making it enjoyable so it's not 'drill, drill' so the athlete gets bored and also not pushed too fast so the athlete becomes scared. Diving is a sport where, if they get it wrong, they get a 'slap' (by entering the water wrong), and children will vote with their feet if they are not enjoying it so we lose them. To use Tom as an example, I always knew he was happy because he swung the steps on the way to the diving board. If he wasn't doing that, there was something wrong, and I needed to find out what and try to rectify it.

I have seen youngsters lost to the sport because coaches have pushed too hard or too fast, and that is something I really want to avoid. We have to look after and nurture our talent.

Parents as well as coaches can place far too much pressure on their youngsters, and if this becomes too much of an issue, then I will speak with them about the best way they can support and also facilitate the best environment for their child to progress. Let the professionals get on with their job and be supportive, whichever way the results are going.

Of course, you also need to protect adults too so you never put yourself into a position where any accusation can be made of inappropriate behaviour. When you have a one-to-one session or conversation, you do it in the open with

other people around to see you. Then it is not possible for any other question to be raised.

Colin Bennett: As the athlete you coach goes further up the talent pathway, do you become more motivator, confidant and critical friend, rather than a technique coach? How do you, the coach, learn this new role?

Andy Banks: I very much agree with the Bill Sands philosophy that the coach starts off as the ‘dictator’ in the early days. Then, as the child and athlete develops and becomes better and more mature, you develop into the ‘adviser’. There is still a technical input and a lot of planning, but the athlete becomes part of the decision-making process, and as someone who has helped to plan what they are doing, they are more likely to be fully behind the process.

I want that to be as soon as possible because I don’t view it as **my** sport. I’m just a facilitator, it’s really all about them. I don’t want to become a crutch, I want them to be able to think on their own and stand up and perform on their own. A degree of self-sufficiency is therefore really important.

I have worked with a number of athletes from childhood, through adolescence into adulthood – with Tom, it was from age eight up to 19, with Tonia (Couch, another European medal-winning athlete coached by Banks) from 10 through to 26.

I guess it’s a bit like being a parent – you watch them grow physically and emotionally and have to make a call on when they are ready for more involvement in the process. It’s not always an easy call.

One story comes to mind, and it was when I was with Tom, aged 13, at one of his first senior events. He had progressed to the semi-final, and I said to him: ‘What do you want to do to prepare?’ He looked

at me, rather shocked, and said: 'I don't know, you just tell me, and I'll do it, like we normally do!' I therefore realised that it was a bit early for that event, and I gave him the plan. But as time progressed, I continued to work on him getting more involved in the planning of his own programmes and understanding how it was put together.

There are a number of times I have got it wrong, and I think effective crisis management is a big part of what we do. It's like being roped to an athlete on a mountain pathway, and they slip off – helping them back on again quickly and effectively is key to continued success.

Steve Bentall: I'd be really keen to know what role Andy played when the Twitter storm hit Tom during the Olympic Games.

Andy Banks: To be honest, when you are at the Olympics Games, you are in a bit of a bubble, and it's easy to stay away from the news if you want to. The actual facts of what went on in Beijing were quite different from some of the stories being portrayed, and we took a team decision, which included Tom, to just ignore it and not to look for it on social media. Bear in mind that Tom's following on social media was already in the millions, and he couldn't see everything that was posted even if he wanted to.

At that stage, he was only 14 so there was always someone with him when he went into areas where the media were, including often the BOA media liaison specialists who could keep overexcited journalists at bay. We also discussed some general 'politician-style' responses to questions that talked about his concentration on the competitions to come and the focus being very much on that and not anything in the past.

Liz Burkinshaw: How did you manage to keep up with Tom's social, emotional and psychological changes throughout his teens? What did Tom teach you as a coach?

Andy Banks: To be honest, Tom developed a very effective way of dealing with the pressures of life all for himself. From a very early age, he developed what he called his 'different lives', or basically being extremely good at compartmentalising the different aspects he had to deal with.

So he has a social life, a diving life, a family life, a media life etc, which he keeps separate and does not let each interfere with the other. He is very bright and wanted to excel in schoolwork as well as sport so he was never behind with his schoolwork – that was his 'school life', and there was always specific time planned for it.

Whatever he was doing, that was what he was focused on at that time, and he gave each thing 100%.

In that way, he was very mature, and his system was extremely effective. He could change from one to the other if absolutely necessary, but generally, he liked the plan to be stuck to, and things were organised to fit.

The most interesting part about coaching Tom as a youngster was dealing with his emotional control. He was a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde character in both training and competition and could lose the plot very easily if things were not going right, which was not a good thing for either situation. He is a perfectionist, which is good, but it also has a downside if things are not going perfectly. It's well documented that we used a 'Peter Pan' analogy to help him with this as a young child.

We would talk about Peter Pan and the Darling family and how they could fly if they thought happy thoughts. If the happy thoughts drifted, then they fell out of the sky. When Tom was happy, he flew! And the concept helped him to understand that emotion can be controlled. It's something that takes a while for youngsters to master, and there are other analogies such

as the Steve Peters 'chimp' and Alan Watkins 'planets' that I have found help a lot alongside discussion of the science behind emotion as the athlete grows older. Tom is now a master at it, as with many other things.

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